52 Tavistock Square

Wednesday.

Dearest Creature,

I only got your letter this morning, so I rang up a surly butler, & heard Eddy was ill but Mrs Nicolson was better. I do hope so. Not that Eddy should be ill. Only I hate your having flu — it aint right, or honest. Why did you? How are you? Please say. Thank God Harold comes back, & puts an end to so ~~[illegible]~~ your lunches, motoring. I own practically everyone has it — Mother et cetera. But still it's largely your reckless spendthrift life, & please curb it, & influenza's no joke: one's heart goes wrong. I say therefore (but I'm in a hurry speaking that mooncalf Philip Morrell) please don't be rash, at Dottys. Let me know if you will lunch here on Monday: what time you come & how long you can stay. We were so bitter cold at Lewes that we fled. Everyone

host
had colds — coal gave out — sudden visitors — my host testy about cigarette ends among his plants — one very lovely drive — awfully difficult to exist at all out of one's own house; & now, darling Mrs N: — there's a surprise coming, so read carefully, every word.

One thing is, I don't think Knole is possible; for this reason: I tore all my clothes on the gorse, & can't get any more; & I couldn't ask your butler to wait on me, nor is it for the dignity of letters that I should eat behind a screen, so I don't see how I can come to Knole, all in holes, without a pin to my hair or a stocking to my foot. You'd be ashamed; you'd say things you would regret. But read carefully what's coming. It's this:

I am going to America.

Now that's exciting isn't it?

But I shan't be gone on Monday, so I'll tell you about it then.

But Vita darling let me hear how you are: please take care: awful awful awful haste

Your Virginia

NYPL
HAMILL & BARKER 2/5/62

52 Tavistock Square,
London,
W.C.1.
Telephone: Museum 2621

Just rcd 20 Teheran.

America —

The 'Tribune' offered me free passage, hotel bills, & £120 to go to New York for a month in the spring & write 4 articles. I've said I will if I can arrange times, & not too much work — but I daresay they wont agree. I think it would be rather fun, for a few weeks, & I should see some odd things. Dont you agree? Leonard would come.

Monday alas — We go to Rodmell early on Tuesday afternoon; but I shall be here (studio) all the morning. Let me know what you want. I'll keep Monday free anyhow.

Pinker. If you cant lend her, couldnt you come over to Rodmell & stay? I suppose not — with the children — Curse it.

Knole. I was partly teasing. ~~[illegible]~~ I dont mind being dowdy on you — its dirty, shabby, red nosed middleclassness & all the rest — its only a question when & how. I do want to see you, I do — I do. How did Brighton go? Write a long long letter from Sherfield — Virginia

52 Tavistock Sqre

Monday 31st Jan 1927

My dear Honey, it was nice to get your telegram & letter — write as many as you can. It gives one a fillip. The only good thing that's happened to me is that the moment you left I became involved in a series of telephones, notes, scenes with Clive & Mary, all very emotional, which left me so angered, so sordidified, so exacerbated that I could only think of you as being very distant & beautiful & calm. A lighthouse in clean water. I can't give details, which would bore you, (happy as you are, old devil, with Harold in Persia): but I can assure you, you'll find things as usual in May: Clive giving champagne suppers to Mary. I was amused to think how angry certain charges made against me by Mary would have made you — God, if you'd been here, what fun we should have had! But the main good was that I've been kept on the hop the whole time: so I've been restless & scattered; its like taking sleeping draughts: I try my best to put off thinking about you. Then there was the Webbs: how dreamlike things are, how skinned of flesh & blood when ones thinking of Vita going further & further! My word how it blew the night you went! — I was launched on a 6 mile walk on a cold common on a raging morning with Sidney Webb. All my sentences leapt into the middle of the pond without a moment's reflection. Surrey is passing by a beastly pool of self-conscious beauty — detestable — Webb said one must remember what a difference Mahommedanism had made to the negroes in Sierra Leone: whereupon without a second I plunged: made some dreadful howler, Leonard said. And there was a stunted brown woollen secretary woman at table who said "Might I trouble you for a little drop of water?", her only remark, except to the dog. Incredibly ugly it all was except for Lord Russell, bastard of Elizabeth, enormous, wearing a crucifix

Wednesday. Feb. 2nd. No letter from you today or yesterday: I suppose you're in Moscow. Here its snowy: melting though, & the rain coming through my skylight. I woke in the night & was very dismal. My sleeping draught (Clive & Mary) is wearing off. Another long interview with Mary yesterday. We were about to fly at each others throats when ~~w~~ in walked Eddie: stayed complacently an hour or so: & only left in time for a hasty explanation. Dear, dear, its an odd story: he's not going away. Her sleeper has been cancelled. Her ferocity commands my respect: indeed we made it up: but whether she can hold him, firmly, for ever, I have my doubts. He has made a fool of her all over London — Colefax that is, & Ethel Sands: Colefax came to tea. Why do people laugh at me? she asked. D'you know its a great thing being a Eunuch as I am: that is not knowing what's the right side of a skirt: women confide in one. One pulls a shade over the fury of sex; & ~~they~~ all the veins & marbling, which, between women are so fascinating, show out. Here in my cave I ~~never~~ see ~~the~~ lots of things you blazing beauties make invisible by the light of your own glory.

NYPL

No: I'm not going to America. They write that they are entertaining me at dinners, but not, apparently paying my hotel bills. So the cost would swallow up all my earnings, & I think we can cry off & go to Greece.

12.30. A cable from America, asking me to come later: I suppose they may offer more money; but no, I think I won't be bribed: unless its tremendous.

Yes, honey, we are buying the Bookshop — at least negotiations are begun; Francis is dining here tonight. He says its the chance of our lives. Leonard is like a hound with his nose to the ground. But weeks & months will pass in conversation. What fun though, dont you think — suppose we did it, & it was a great success, & I had a motor car, & we went

bookbuying all over England!

I've not got a cold in my head, but its like having a cold in the head, sitting here writing to you & everything at sixes & sevens. I feel dissipated & aimless for some reason. I've got to read all Morgan's novels, & so far cant open a book without being interrupted. Then its you being away — I am at the mercy of people & moods, feel lonely, like something pitiable which cant make its wants known. Now you have demoralised me! I was once a stalwart upstanding woman. Then its not writing novels: this journalism is such a thin draggled straining business. & I keep opening the lid & looking into my mind to see whether some new fish isnt rising there — some new book. No: nothing at the moment.

Yes, I like you to write good poetry. My parting lecture was not very coherent. I was trying to get at something about the thing itself before its made into anything: the emotion, the idea. The danger for you with your sense of tradition & all those words — a gift of the Gods though — is that you help this too easily into existence. I dont mean that one ought to strain, to write shortly, expensively, or so on: only that one ought to stand outside with one's hands folded, until the thing has made itself visible: we born writers tend to be ready with our silver spoons ~~before~~ too early: I mean I think there are odder, deeper, more angular thoughts in your mind than you have yet let come out. Still. You'll get the Hawthornden, oh yes. & I shall be vaguely jealous, proud, disgusted. I'm going to read the Land through as soon as I get a chance.

Are you perishing with cold at Moscow now? It's fine again here: I have set up a little type. Talked to Angus & Mrs Cartwright, must now finish this, & post it, & try to read a little & so get control of my fidgets.

Dearest Honey, are you well & happy, & did the journey go easily, & is Harold very happy, & do you ever think of the basement & — & — a kiss from Pinker: one from me to the Insect. I'll write weekly. V.

52 Tavistock Sqre
London.

Saturday
5th Feb
1927

Dearest Honey,

No letter since you were careering through the snow in Westphalia — that is nothing since Monday. I hope this doesn't mean you have been eaten by brigands, wrecked, torn to pieces. It makes me rather dismal. It gets worse steadily — your being away. All the sleeping draughts — the irritants have worn off, & I'm settling down to wanting you, doggedly, dismally, faithfully — I hope that pleases you. Its damned unpleasant for me, I can assure you. I had a sort of idea that I'd cheat the devil, & put my head under my wing, & think of nothing. But it wont work — not at all. I want you this Saturday more than last & so it'll go on.

You are on the Caspian? Its lovely here; an Early Spring. You are being tossed up & down in a smelly ship — you & Dotty & Leigh in his horn glasses — & I sit over the gas in my sordid room. Why cant I write except in sordid rooms? I dont think I could write a word in your room at Long Barn. Furniture that people can sit in implies people, & I want complete solitude — thats at the back of my mind, & so I get sordider & sordider. The

Voyage Out was written in comparative splendour – a maid, carpets,
fires; To the Lighthouse was written – as you know. So
the next book will necessitate a shed. This fits in
with my mood at the moment. I have banged my door on
parties; dug myself into a dank dismal burrow, where I
do nothing but read & write. This is my hybernating season. I
read 5 hours yesterday. the same today. Its grim but salutary.
Then May will be all festive, wont it? I'm a little
jealous about Harold. I've suddenly become absorbed in a
book about reading novels, & cant stop making phrases. So
thats the book I see when I lift the lid & look in. Its going to
be about how to read all history as if it were one book one
had written oneself. Then you're damned lustrous Jack, like
the portrait your ancestors by a great painter in the wall ga
gallery with a light blazing on it intervenes. You hang
there so fruity. so rich.

<u>Monday 7th Feb</u>

At last! A letter from Moscow this
morning. Oh what a blessing! It has taken a whole
week to come. Yes; I should have liked it if you had
telegraphed: no: I should <u>not</u> have thought you foolish. Lord
Bless me! think of making your paramour husband!
What did he say? And then the dinner & Lenins body! Please

write everything fully when you have time. Now you are nearly at Teheran I make out, motoring across mountains; stopping at some shed I daresay for lunch, sandwiches, wine. You are very excited, all in a ~~[illegible]~~ whirl, like a flock of birds flying across; Harold will be pacing up & down his room. I think of this journey so that I could write a book about not being a Passenger to Teheran. But its silly to tell you my version, as perhaps you have your own.

Here its pouring: rain coming through the roof: the sordidity too much for me even. I think I shall make some money & buy a carpet. Would one carpet interfere with ones solitude, d'you think? Or an ash tray? Or an arm chair?

All the harpies descend on me the moment you go. They wait for the body to be exposed defenceless — Sibyl, Ethel, now Ozzie. Ozzie says "We all thought Vita very depressed at Wolters party". He tries to make out that its because your mother is jealous of anyone you speak to — thats me, I gather. And "Vita is so good to her mother". ~~The old thing is trying to pry into our affairs with her old snuffling nose, & dribbling like~~ But I'm getting Raymond here to protect me. This is typical of Ozzie in ~~the~~ day when he told me how to behave, who to marry &c.

Could you & Harold go on top of a Tram up to Hampstead on a raining Saturday afternoon?

I kept trying to imagine it. Instantly all the lights ~~and~~ went up & the whole tram became golden rosy – Isnt it odd how the vision at the Sevenoaks fishmongers has worked itself into my idea of you? We went to see ~~Kentses~~ Keats' home, & I invented a story about two little ~~beasts~~ beasts with a passion for muffins (cousins of the Insect they are) & I went into a shop & bought muffins & a woman said was I Miss Stephen whom she'd known 20 years before – Then I went & sat in the room where Keats wrote his odes, & saw the engagement ring he gave Fanny & opened the cupboard in which he kept his books – We'll go there on a tram: but it'll be May.

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America is off, temporarily at least. I'm afraid I shall have to go later though, & rather wish I'd got it over now in a month with you abroad. I think we shall go to Greece with Roger; there's also an invitation to motor in Spain with Wadie in May – this is much urged on me, but I think there are 'private reasons' against it.

Clive has apparently settled down again – Vanessa writes frantic letters saying 'why is Clive utterly miserable & coming here for 3 months" – then "why is Clive not coming at all – but

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Gives no reason?" To which I can only echo "long?"

<u>Tuesday 9th Feb.</u>

Now you're just arriving I make out — driving into the gates of Teheran. Harold come out to meet you. There you sit as proud as a peacock. Dotty is tactful. Well well, its all very exciting, even here in the studio with the rain coming through. My God, to be with you & the 14 cream coloured ponies, & the young mare, & the lighted window in the fishmongers shop! Still I admit that Harold has some right to this morning: I wish to God I'd asked you to wire. I wish I knew if you <u>had</u> arrived, & <u>were</u> safe, & <u>are</u> well. I trust to Dotty to tell me if you're not. Thank her for her letter. I'll write to her.

Did I lead a life of utter idleness while you were here? putting off all disagreeable jobs? I suppose so. Masses of manuscripts are now tumbling on my head: I'm to see the pillmaker of Percy Circus: I'll send you a box of vegetable pills: then theres the Eliot fund, & Desmond's fund, & people all at

legs & sevens. In short I'm very busy about rather dull things; not busy for you; busy for me. And now, did I tell you about Marys bloody book? (Its confidential please) She's at last produced this thrice hardboiled egg & Leonard says its bilge, & he's going to tell her so. Theres a Press crisis on too — what to do about the future of Angus — another painful interview, for L. thinks he had better go. And then someone's bidding for Birrell & Garnett & will probably get it; but as Pollard is a fixture & Pollard is a brute, perhaps its as well.

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Wednesday

Oh & heres Clive to say he's off to France — I say But isnt that rather unexpected? Not a bit says Clive. Then what about Mary? Here he waves his hand as if he had just heard of her but thats all — Another quarrel, I suppose: but whether final or not, heaven knows.

Sibyls latest. A letter from Walter de la Mare to say he's so sorry he cant accept Lady Colefax's invitation to come to tea with me. The first I'd heard of it. And then Sibyl asks me to tell her what she does to make people to laugh!

Goodbye dearest honey. Write to me please as much as you can. Yes yes yes I do like you. I am afraid to write the stronger word.

V Kirsmeer

Wednesday. Feb. 16th

52 Tavistock Sqre.

Anyhow, dearest Honey, you are safe at Teheran. I saw Ozzie, who let this pearl fall from his dribbling lips: also your mother has written one of her most gracious letters "Dear Mr. & Mrs. Woolf, bless you for being so good to my child", to which I have answered, suitably, I hope, in deep humility. Harold is a happy man — I am an envious woman. Yesterday too I got your letter from Gwalior with Leigh dancing, & Miss Jebb swinging from the rack. So now, you're there; & I like it better than when your going further & further away. That's all I can say.

Did I say I was leading a solitary life, reading 5 hours a day? My God, what a fool to think it possible! Take yesterday: Sibyl at 4. Consultation about getting money for Desmond. Sibyl a little huffy with Clive. I try to soothe. Let her run on. Is Mollie extravagant? Are we to pay debts or subscribe for a holiday? Or should there be two funds? What about the Eliot fund? Some people won't pay for Desmond's debts; others not for his holiday. Enter little Turner, the one like a tipsy rook who dined with us. Sibyl goes. Turner flatters me. You have such an imaginative view of life. I get suspicious. What's the matter? Do you live with your wife? Well that's what I want to discuss with you. Then it comes out hes in love with a daughter of Mrs Saxton Noble: will I see her & persuade her to become his mistress? Here Lytton rings up. May he dine? Oh all right. Off fish? Oh certainly. Yes, Mr. Turner — (but call me Walter) yes Walter I'll see Cynthia: but you'll have to marry her. Francis

Borell rings up. Bunin's starving in Paris. Can you help to get up a fund to pay his doctor's bill? Oh yes — certainly. I'll ask Leonard. Yes, walter. I'll see her: but I think you'll have to marry her. But I want to keep them both. Here Pinker upset the electric lamp: the flat is ~~left~~ completely dark. ~~Mr~~ Turner goes. Lytton comes. We sit up talking about Queen Elizabeth, sodomy, love, the Antigone & Othello, when Clive rings up. will you dine to meet Elizabeth Bibesco? No I won't. Will ~~Lyt~~ Leonard? No. Will Lytton? No. And so to bed. Next morning Christie on the telephone. May I say. Mrs Woolf. I think its a great mistake to let Sibyl have anything to do with the fund? Also, why subscribe for a holiday? Surely the debts are the important thing. If you will come & lunch ....' Then Clive's brother. Look here Virginia about that motor car. If you really want one I should advise so & so. Then supper at Clives: & so here we are.

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I'm afraid I'm being very jerky & dull.
Do you realise how devoted I am to you, all the same? There's nothing I wouldn't do for you, dearest Honey. Its true the other night, I did take a glass too much. Its your fault though — that Spanish wine. I got a little tipsy. And then Bobo Mayer is a great seducer in her way. She has Gipsy blood in her. She's rather violent & highly coloured, sinuous too, with a boneless body, & thin hands; all the things I like. So, being a little tipsy about twelve o'clock at night, I let her do it.

She cut my hair off. I'm shingled.

That being so — & it'll look all right in a month or two, the hairdresser says — bound to be a ~~litt~~ little patchy at first — lets get on to other things. Its off: its in the kitchen bucket: my hairpins have been offered up like crutches in St Andrews, Holborn, at the high altar. Darling Honey, if anything could make me say Vita's a villain it is that you didnt tell me. You'll be happier, wiser, serener, cleverer a thousand times shingled than haired. As for beauty, I looked in the glass a week ago; & I assure you, its an illusion: a mirage: I'm a plain woman; shall be plainer; so a bingling & shingling more or less dont matter: but let us get on to something interesting. ~~Of course~~ ~~Mean~~

Nothing occurs to me at the moment.

There has been a good deal of talk one way & another about Vita Sackville. Oh said Clive, yesterday, I dreamt I was engaged to Vita. What an old nuisance Colefax is, says Roger. There I was talking to Vita Nicolson & beginning to find her so sympathetic, when in butts Colefax. Come & ~~talk~~ tell me about Alexandria, or something. Vita's at the bottom of your shingling I know, Vanessa writes in a wild fury. Vita seems to pervade the quarter curiously.

I had the pillmaker of Percy Lorcan to tea: a red fingered woman, clumsy, woollen; obdurate & monosyllabic: but hungry for crumpets. And who should come in but George ~~Duckworth~~ Duckworth, as fat as a louse, but beady eyed like a rat, & so condescending to us all, I first lost my temper, & then laughed; & he told us one little story to his own glory after another, till I said, They'll be making you a peer next, which he said they mean to do, at the first opportunity. Suddenly the pill maker collapsed: she must go to the water closet, she said. Was it the crumpets? or George? or if one makes vegetable pills, do they act, ~~in course~~ inconveniently, at any moment?

Such is my life this week.

Please Vita dear dont forget your humble creatures — Pinker & Virginia — Here we are sitting by the gas fire alone. Every morning she jumps on to my bed & kisses me, & I say Thats Vita.

But she has worms again.

Leonard says, Isnt it rather remarkable you haven't had influenza this year? I say Thats Vita.

Oh & we are having such a to do in the Press. Wells has asked us to do a pamphlet of his: & I've got an essay out of de la Mare. Our conversation with Angus was a complete misfire. He wont go. He cant see that he need go. Then Birrells book shop is sold, I'm afraid;

I must stop this, but like lingering over it, though my hand is so cold I cant write, in order to be with you. You shall ruffle my hair in May. Honey: its as short as a partridges rump.

Heres Leonard

Your

Virginia

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52 T. S. { P. to T. has sold 915
What about your story?

Friday
18th Feb. 1927.

Sweet Honey, Nelly has just brought into the Studio where I'm correcting proofs of the Lighthouse your cable "Agree about Doran". It's not a very intimate message, but it gives me a little thrill of pleasure, & I make you say instead Good morning Virginia. Good morning Vita. You'd want you more & more. You'll like to think of me unhappy I know. Well, you can.

Last time I wrote in such a tearing hurry I was ashamed to send it, so now I'm beginning early. but there'll be endless interruptions. I want to know, particularly, among a crowd of other things, have you talked to Harold about giving up silk stockings & swords & gold lace & bribery & becoming a sensible man? If so, what has he said? Now you will have got over your torrent of talk, & might have a little serious conversation. At a conclave here the other night it was universally agreed that he was a loss to the world as it is: much too good for that everyone said—but then he's ambitious, some one said. Nonsense, I said.

You are sitting by the Karun (I dont know what the name is) I fancy, & seeing us all as little bright beads in

in a plate miles beneath. You see us, & you think we dont see you. I assure you I'm cautious of you all day long, soaring above my head. And am I a bright bead, or a dark bead, in the plate? Or dont I exist?

We're still talking, you'll be surprised to hear, about love — sodomy & Bunny's last book, & Vita & Eddy, & Desmond's fund, shall it be for his debts or his holiday? — with Lytton, Clive, Morgan, Raymond, Mary &c. There we sit in Clive's ~~xx~~ smoky room, with the brandy & the tumblers, & Mary wears a black patch on her left cheek & a golden turban. How nice you look shingled! she says — why dont you do it? I say. But think if I were to look a horror for a whole six weeks! she says. I say that's a serious matter. Then Morgan says he's worked it out & one spends 3 hours on food, 6 on sleep, 4 on work, 2 on love. Lytton says 10 on love. I say the whole day on love. I say its seeing things through a purple shade. But you've never been in love they say.

Monday. Feb 21st

It gets worse you'll be glad to hear, steadily worse. Today the day when I should be trotting out to buy you your coat, & watching for you white legs — not widow Cartwright — coming down the

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bereavement steps. Instead you're on the heights of Persia, riding an Arab mare I daresay to some deserted garden & picking yellow tulips.

My solace is what? — dining with Ethel Sands to meet Violet Bonham Carter, & laboriously correcting two sets of proofs. My goodness how you'll dislike that book! Honestly you will — Oh but you shant read it. Its a Ghost between us. Whether its good or bad, I know not: I'm dazed, I'm bored, I'm sick to death: I go on crossing out commas & putting in semi-colons in a state of marmoreal despair. I suppose there may be half a paragraph somewhere worth reading: but I doubt it.

I read Cowper: the Task. Now there's a man with a dash of white fire in him. It comes so strangely, among such flummery: one line, one phrase. There's no Cowper in Persia, you'll say; if there were, read some of the Task. Task. The domestic scenes are lovely: & then this white fire: what I call central transparency. For a long poem of course you need a mould: & lines to fall smooth one after another: but also now & again what saves one is the wave rising solitary; a line about a hare perhaps; something said with the formal lilt, but completely in his own voice. This seems to me the triumph of style.

Wednesday

Ethel's party was'nt bad; I liked Violet Bonham Carter, save that she sits too close, & cranes too near. Philip Ritchie told me I was the chief coquette in London: "allumeuse" Clive corrected him. Then my suspenders came down, dragging with them an old rag of chemise— why didnt you tell me one must fasten ones suspenders properly? I can dress now in 5 minutes: just think of that. But always some misery like suspenders clips my wings of glory; & Good God, I must buy a hat.

Well darling: no letter from you since Monday week. I must wait till next Monday, a whole fortnight I suppose. How are you? Any malaria? Hows Dotty? Does she like ~~it~~ Persia? My love to her. Oh I'm ~~so~~ solitary, except for Leonard: Clive went this morning. We had an affecting farewell. I think I cried. I feel so fond of him; & then he's in an odd state — God knows whats happening, save that I feel sure Mary is angry with me, & thinks I'm at the bottom of it. Of what, though? God knows.

I think we shall probably go to ~~F~~ Greece the end of March & be back the end of April; & then I shall spend May motoring in Spain with Dadie — hah hah! — & June in Italy with Nancy; & July in Rodmell with Pinker; & August in Geneva with Ramsay Macdonald. But there'll be one night with you at Long Barn. Snore. Snore. Snore.

Your Virginia

HAMILL & BARKER 2/5/62